TAMERLANE’S CONQUEST OF HERAT
AND THE ‘POLITICS OF NOTABLES’

SUMMARY

Jean Aubin (1963) analyzed Tamerlane’s (Temür’s) capture of cities. This paper extends his study by focusing on the actions of notables (a’yān) of Khurasan, and Herat specifically, to the existential threat posed by Temür. Boaz Shoshan (1986), the “politics of notables,” offers an analytical framework. Led by Sufis, Zayn al-Dīn Taybādī and heirs of Aḥmad-i Jām, notables secretly communicated with Temür to offer him support for the conquest of Khurasan. They feared that the Kart king’s decision to resist Temür would lead to rapine and ruin, as happened with Chinggis Khan in 619/1222. Moreover, the Sufis of Jām, sensing the demise of their Kartid patrons, sought a new patron in Temür. Taybādī and the Kartid vizier, Mu’īn al-Dīn Jāmī, were instrumental in the plans to surrender Herat; and to attract Temür to Aḥmad-i Jām’s saint cult. Their letters to Temür, and Taybādī’s hagiography, offer insights into how a’yān acted during a crisis, fostered the commonweal, and prevented a “general massacre” (qaṭl-i ʿāmm).

Keywords: Kart; Tamerlane; Timurid; Taybādī; Herat; notables.

RÉSUMÉ


Mots clés : Karts ; Tamerlan ; Timourides ; Taybādī ; Hérat; notables.

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INTRODUCTION *

Tamerlane’s conquest of Herat in 783/1381 was distinguished by the relatively low level of bloodshed and destruction for a city that had resisted. In general, Chinggis Khan (d. 624/1227) and Tamerlane (d. 807/1405) spared cities that opened their gates to the invader; whereas cities that had resisted experienced the notorious qaṭl-i ‘āmm, days of unbridled rapine and slaughter. Cities that revolted subsequent to their surrender were destroyed. This became Herat’s fate in 619/1222. Tamerlane was to become notorious for his massacres and wanton cruelties; but as Beatrice Forbes Manz has demonstrated in her study of Tamerlane, he was a man of “extraordinary intelligence ... a master politician and military strategist.” Violence was not the primary tool in his toolkit.

Tamerlane’s propensity for violence was tempered by an accord he had reached with notables (a’yān) of Khurasan before his armies surrounded Herat. The notables had parochial motives, but they also acted to protect the commonweal. Their actions and fears were informed by Herat’s history with the Mongols. In the first siege of Herat, c. Rabī’ II 618/May 1221, led by Chinggis Khan’s son, Toluy, one Herati faction wanted to continue the fight, the other wanted to surrender. The city capitulated. According to the Timurid-era historian Mīrkhwānd, only the partisans of Jalāl al-Dīn Mengūbirī (the last Khwārizmshāh) were killed, while “the rest of the people came to no harm whatsoever.” Following rebellion and the murder of the Mongol overseer (shaḥna), Herat was besieged by armies commanded by Eljigidey noyan, and subjected to the qaṭl-i ‘āmm, c. Jumādā I 619/June-July 1222. Herat’s road to recovery was long.

Khurasan’s notables had acted during crises to protect Kartid Herat. In 696/1297, for example, the Shaykh al-Islām of Jām, Shihāb al-Dīn Ismā‘īl Jāmī (d. c. 736-38/1336-38), negotiated with the Mongols to end their siege of Herat; and in 698/1299, when the Mongol armies again besieged Herat, Shihāb al-Dīn Ismā‘īl negotiated the ransom. In 706/1306, when the Karts and Mongols clashed yet again, Shaykh al-Islam Qūṭ al-Dīn Chishftī (b. c. 658/1260) was the negotiator. In Transoxiana, c. 617/1220,

* I am grateful to Prof. Beatrice Forbes Manz for her comments on an earlier version of this paper. Warm thanks to Prof. Shahzad Bashir for giving me a copy of his forthcoming article on hagiographies. Errors remain my responsibility.

1 See, for example, the indictment in Gibbon 1914, VII, p. 73.
2 Manz 1989, p. 16.
4 Mīrkhwānd 1380/2001, p. 3880.
8 Ibid., p. 489ff.
the Shaykh al-Islam and Qadi of Samarqand negotiated with Chinggis Khan to save lives.\(^9\) A salutary lesson is from Marv, where notables fell into factionalism,\(^10\) which contributed to everyone’s downfall. Notables learned from these experiences: firstly, resistance to Turco-Mongol conquerors could end very badly; secondly, disunity led to calamity; and thirdly, negotiations can be successful. The “wearers of turbans,” particularly Shaykh al-Islams, were ideally placed to negotiate and to protect the commonweal.

Khurasanian notables recognized the weakness of their sovereign, malik Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Pīr ‘Alī Kart (r. 771-783/1370-1381; d. 785/1383). They were alarmed by his plans to resist Temür (Tamerlane). The Kart vizier, Khwāja Muʿīn al-Dīn (Abū al-Makārim) Jāmī (fl. 702-783/1302-1382), a descendant of Shaykh al-Islam Aḥmad-ı Jām (d. 536/1141), secretly communicated with Temūr and his senior officials (sadors) in Samarqand. He offered support by Khurasanian notables for Temūr’s conquest of Khurasan. Support by Khurasanians for the Kart malik had declined, mainly as a consequence of his decade-long anti-Shi’a campaigns, which had left swaths of Khurasan in upheaval, and the Kartid state financially and militarily enervated.\(^11\) Khurasanians’ anxieties were exacerbated by Pīr ‘Alī’s decision to harden Herat’s defences (780/1378-79). The decision catalyzed the opposition.

Temūr’s siege of Herat was brief. He evidently understood that resistance had not been the choice of Heratis but of the malik and his retinue. Lawrence Potter’s observation is insightful: “the people of Herat seemed unwilling to seriously defend the city.”\(^12\) Herat was surrendered by Pīr ‘Alī, who met with Temūr in the Ravens’ Garden (bāgh-i zāghān) for the cession ceremonial. The malik was deported to Transoxiana. Early in 785/1383, following a rebellion by certain Kartids and their Ghurid squadron, Pīr ‘Alī and his son were executed in Samarqand. Here, too, Temūr evidently understood that the rebellion had originated with a distinct political bloc, and Herat was spared collective punishment. Isfahan’s fate offers a stark contrast to Herat’s treatment: after Isfahan had submitted to Temūr, it rebelled in 789/1387. Massacre was the collective penalty.\(^13\)

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9 Juvaini 1958, I, p. 120.
10 Ibid., I, pp. 154-158.
11 On the Sarbadārs, see Smith 1970; Aubin 1974; Mahendarajah 2012.
12 Potter 1992, p. 53. See also Aubin 1963, p. 95 and n. 6 (references to Zafarnāma of Yazdī and Zafarnāma of Shāmī).
In addition to the Kart vizier, Mu’in al-Dīn, a leading actor against the *malik* was Mawlānā Zayn al-Dīn (Abū Bakr) Taybādī (d. 791/1389). The Mawlānā was a devotee of Aḥmad-i Jām and allied with the senior shaykhs at Turbat-i Jām (“the Shaykhs of Jām”) who administered Aḥmad’s shrine and its extensive estates. Jāmī shaykhs included the vizier’s sons and nephews. Taybādī had a meeting with Temūr that is (in)famous for his insolence toward the conqueror. This memorable display of *lèse-majesté* was discussed by Jean Aubin, Vladimir Barthold, Beatrice Manz, Jürgen Paul, and Lawrence Potter. Although oft discussed, the context for, and the fruits of, the meeting have not been analyzed. This we shall do. Taybādī’s insolence was deliberate and calculated to attract Temūr who had superstitious fascination with holy men as we shall demonstrate.

The “politics of notables,” the theme of insightful analyses and commentary by Boaz Shoshan, illuminates the thought processes of the notables of Khurasan in acting against their king. “Notables” is utilized as broadly understood by Orientalists, denoting “a mixed bag of social groups”: shaykhs, ulama, sayyids, qadis, *a’yān*, and similar terms suggesting high social standing. A subset of notables include those termed “patricians” by Richard W. Bulliet, who in “medieval Iranian cities” were “the top rung of local society” and came from “a limited number of wealthy extended families ...” The Shaykhs of Jām were the lords of their semi-autonomous polity. The notables represented Herat and the diverse Khurasanian communities within Herat’s political orbit.

Generally, for notables, “politics was a secondary pursuit to be engaged in only to achieve specific goals, and especially in moments of crisis.” The crises confronting the Shaykhs of Jām were the crises inflicted on Khurasan and the Kartid state by Pīr ‘Alī’s anti-Shi’ī campaigns, and the *existential threat* posed by Temūr. The Shaykhs had much to lose: they were kin and affines to the Karts, and had benefited from almost one century of Kartid patronage and protection. Venality and self-preservation, however, are inadequate explanatory paradigms.

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14 Potter 1992, pp. 82-126; Mahendrarajah 2014.
15 Aubin 1956, p. 15.
21 Ibid., pp. 180-181.
22 Bulliet 1972, p. 20; Bulliet 1978, pp. 35-56 (on the city lords of Samarqand and Bukhara).
Notables have an illustrious history in Khurasan and Transoxiana of interceding in crises, as with the examples proffered earlier on the Shaykh al-Islams of Jām, Chisht, and Samarqand. Intercession by Herati notables is not limited to the Mongol and Timurid epochs, as Jürgen Paul has shown for Seljûq Herat.25

Notables in this quarter of Khurasan had a history of intercession at critical times. Shaykh al-Islams often led the network of notables that coalesced during crises, and also represented the interests of commoners. This is a history of notables from Herat, Jām, and Taybād acting in concert to protect themselves and their communities from the existential threat posed by Temür and the “imprudent” (ghāfil) leadership of Pīr ‘Alī.

Inside this history is a sub-history, the sub-plot, of the Shaykhs of Jām using the opportunity to advance a parochial agenda: attracting Temür to the saint cult of Aḥmad-i Jām. With the passing of the Karts, shrine and shaykhs needed a new protector.

A NOTE ON SOURCES AND APPROACHES

Ḥāfīz-i Abrū’s Ṭāriḵh-i Salāṭīn-i Kart26 replaces the excerpts on the Karts and Sarbadārs in the Cinq Opuscules de Ḥāfīz-i Abrū utilized by earlier scholars. The Jāmī inshā’ compilation by Yūsuf-i Ahl Jāmī, Farā īd-i Ghiyāṣī,27 contains an array of about 650 unique epistles and chancery documents from Seljūq to Timurid times, although only about half have been published. A copy (savād) of Taybādī’s letter to Temūr is with the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Supplément persan 1815). It was edited by ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Navā’ī.28 The Maqāmat-i Taybādī,29 written in the reign of Shāh Rukh b. Temūr (r. 807-850/1405-1447), is a “critical edition” from manuscripts in Iran.30 The Bodleian’s Malfūz-i Ḥażrat Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn Taybādī is also referenced in this essay.31

Inshā’ as primary sources is appreciated.32 “Hagiographic literature,”33 however, is a term with unsettling connotations to the historian seeking “facts.” A key purpose of a hagiography “is to transmit to a believing and pious audience matters of practical spiritual value ... the whole stuff of

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29 Taybādī 1382/2003.
30 For cautionary views on critical editions, see Bashir (forthcoming).
31 Taybādī (Bodleian). The two texts exhibit minor differences.
modern biography is trivial ...”34 In Taybādī’s situation, spiritual value is wrapped around his interactions with Pīr ‘Alī and Temūr—interactions that can be positively tested against historical sources. Apropos of veracity, Shahzad Bashir demonstrates the centrality of oral transmission (akin hadith) in a hagiography’s “claims of truth and authenticity.”35 The social context from which narratives emerge may have been preserved in the text, which is to say, social context could be extracted from Taybādī’s hagiography.

Spiritual messaging is gleaned from the hagiological narratives on the Taybādī–Temūr–Pīr ‘Alī triangle: Khurasan was the dār al-islām kubrā under Mu’izz al-Dīn Kart whose spiritual guide was Taybādī. However, Pīr ‘Alī Kart had eschewed his father’s path. Taybādī dutifully tried to move Pīr ‘Alī back on to the Straight Path, but he refused. Therefore God sent Temūr to depose the wicked king of Khurasan. Since Temūr was God’s instrument, anyone who assisted Temūr was advancing God’s agenda. The hagiography offers divine sanction for the disloyal actions of Taybādī and the Shaykhs.

**AḤMAD-I JĀM AND HIS DESCENDANTS AT TURBAT-I JĀM AND HERAT**

Aḥmad-i Jām (d. 536/1141) was a mystic who had been active in the Jām region of Khurasan. He had a small but dedicated following, which included Sultan Sanjar al-Seljūq (r. 511-52/1118-57).36 Sanjar’s respect and devotion for Aḥmad came to assume a central position in the self-image and propaganda of subsequent generations of Aḥmad’s devotees. An epistle from Aḥmad to Sanjar is preserved in the Jāmī īnshā’ collection.37 Prominent descendants of Aḥmad in the Kartid era included ulama, shaykh al-islāms, the vizier, a sādr of Herat (the vizier’s son),38 qadis, lecturers, scribes, litterateurs, ascetics, and mystics.39 Since Aḥmad-i Jām had produced thirty-nine sons and three daughters, a surfeit of descendants were living in Khurasan and Transoxiana. Important marriage alliances included the Karts of Herat (r. 643-783/1245-1381), the descendants of ‘Abdallāh Anšārī (the “Sage of Herat”), and the Sayyids of Tirmiz.

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34 Algar 1976, p. 134.
35 Bashir (forthcoming): nn. 30 and 35; no page numbers.
38 On this appointment, see Herrmann 1979, pp. 278-295.
39 For Jāmi biographies, see Būzjānī 1345/1966.
Between 633/1236 and 846/1443, a shrine-complex blossomed around Aḥmad’s grave, funded by the Jāmī qawm, one Ilkhanid vizier, two Kart maliks, Timurid kings and emirs. The Sufi qawm acquired farmlands, orchards, vineyards, ranches, granaries, and irrigation canals in the vilayāts (provinces) of Bakhārz, Fushanj, Herāt Rūd, Jām, Khwāf, and Küsūyī through pious endowments (vaqf), royal grants, and purchases; and held tax immunities and/or soyūrghāls under the Ilkhanids and Timurids.

MAWLĀNĀ ZAYN AL-DĪN TAYBĀDĪ

Zayn al-Dīn Taybādī (d. 791/1389) is a captivating mystic of late Mongol Persia. He was hubristic and irascible, remembered by historians “for his rudeness to Temūr.” Taybādī claims uveysī initiation through the spirit (rūḥ) of Aḥmad-i Jām. His devotion to Aḥmad was intense; for instance, he would walk barefoot from Taybād to Turbat-i Jām (approximately 40 mi./64 km), and occupy himself with Qur’an recitations inside the shrine-complex’s funerary mosque. His devotion to Aḥmad and his warm ties with the Shaykhs are emphasized: the totality of the evidence, direct and circumstantial, indicates that Taybādī and the Jāmīs coordinated their efforts to attract Temūr.

The Maqāmāt-i Taybādī asserts that Mu‘izz al-Dīn (Abū al-Ḥusayn) Muḥammad Kart (r. 732-71/1332-70) was devoted to Taybādī. Narratives on their association reveal the social-historical context in which they had originated: (1) Zayn al-Dīn had respected Mu‘izz al-Dīn as a sovereign favoured by Allah and His Prophet; (2) the malik respected the Mawlānā; (3) Khurasan under Mu‘izz al-Dīn was “the great abode of Islam.”

Excerpts from the hagiography will elucidate these points.

The Prophet of Islam had appeared to the malik in a dream: he asked, “God has given you sovereignty… but what have you done for His believers?” On replying that he desired to advance the Shari‘a, the malik was commanded to go to Taybādī, and warned, “everything that he says, I am saying.” The malik journeyed thenceforth to Taybādī, but Taybādī did not accept his story. Dejected, he retired from Taybādī. A year later, after he had purified himself through pious exercises, the Prophet returned to his dreams. Mu‘izz al-Dīn was informed that on the eighth of Rajab he

40 Golombek 1971; Mahendrarajah 2016.
41 Mahendrarajah 2016.
44 Jāmī 1336/1957, p. 498.
45 On the Prophet motif in dreams, see Katz 2012, pp. 181-197.
46 Taybādī 1382/2003, pp. 86-87; Taybādī (Bodleian), f. 19a-b.
would be infused with the Prophet’s fayz (“divine effusion”). He was ordered back to Taybād. His supplication was accepted. Muʿizz al-Dīn remained in Taybād for ten days in Taybād’s service, and he would return monthly and remain in Taybād’s service for two to three days before returning to Herat. The vilayāt of Khurasan became dār al-islām kubrā. Implied herein is Taybād’s role in mentoring proper kingship and advancing the Shari’a.

In contrast, the tone and thrust of the narratives on Pīr ‘Alī Kart present a poor image of man and king. With the demise of Muʿizz al-Dīn, the hagiographer continues, Pīr ‘Alī eschewed his father’s path entirely (jarīq-i pidar rā tamām az dast bāz dāshht). With Muslims of bad character (musulmānān-i bad maʿāshī), he embraced alcohol and the pursuit of pleasure. He was ill-advised by his inner circle. Corruption (fasād) and ruin (kharābāt) increased in Khurasan. The hagiographer arrives at the crux. Came now the day when Pīr ‘Alī began strengthening Herat’s defences in anticipation of Tamerlane (in 780/1378-79). Apprehension (tashvīsh) rose in the vilayāt of Khurasan and great (bisyār) dejection (malāl) gripped the masses. This state of affairs was brought to Zayn al-Dīn’s attention; he decided to write to the malik.

Taybād’s letter to Pīr ‘Alī Kart

Zayn al-Dīn Taybādī’s naṣīḥat-nāma (advice letter) is preserved in the Jāmī collection. The letter is dense, with Qur’anic quotations punctuating his advice, viz., that the malik is surrounded by false friends and should return to God: “We did indeed make thee a vicegerent on earth: so judge thou between men in truth (and justice): nor follow thou the lusts (of thy heart), for they will mislead thee from the Path of Allah.” No walls are bigger and stronger than justice, and no citadel more beneficial than being with God. The penultimate quotation is stark: “And who does more wrong than one to whom are recited the Signs of his Lord, and who then turns away therefrom? Verily from those who transgress We shall exact (due) Retribution.” Not surprisingly, in the present writer’s opinion, Pīr

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47 Taybādī 1382/2003, pp. 87-89; Taybādī (Bodleian), ff. 19b-20b.
48 The complaint about advisers/friends appears in Taybādī’s letter to Pīr ‘Alī. It suggests that Taybādī had been excluded from Pīr ‘Alī’s circle of intimates.
50 Taybādī 1382/2003, pp. 89-90; Taybādī (Bodleian), ff. 20b-21a.
52 Q38:26 (Sūrat al-Ṣad).
53 Reference to the strengthening of Herat’s walls.
54 Reference to Qal’a-yi Ikhtiyār al-Dīn, the Kartid citadel inside Herat.
55 Q32:22 (Sūrat al-Sajdah).
\textbf{Pîr ‘Alî Kart and the Emergence of Opposition in Khurasan}

It is unlikely that Pîr ‘Alî Kart was as debauched as asserted in the \textit{Maqâmât-i Taybâdî}. The venerable Timurid historian, Ḥâфиз-i Abrû (d. 833/1430), has harsh words regarding Pîr ‘Alî’s political and military deficiencies. Lack of confidence in the \textit{malîk} fuelled the apprehensions (\textit{tashvîh}) of Khurasanians:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Malik Ghiyāṣ al-Dîn was an imprudent (\textit{ghâfîl}) man, not adept (\textit{tamâm nadâsht}) at the governance and statecraft of the \textit{vilâyât} [of Khurasan]. He was soft and inoffensive; unable to commit to diligent effort (\textit{‘uhda-yi ihtimâm}) in war counsel, hostilities, military affairs, and killing.}\n\end{quote}

As the \textit{Maqâmât-i Taybâdî} averred, Pîr ‘Alî had strayed from his father’s path (\textit{jarīq-i pidar}), especially the path of détente with the (Shi‘i) Sarbadârs of Sabzavar. The Sarbadârs emerged in the tumultuous years that followed the death of sultan Abû Sa‘îd (d. 736/1335), the heirless Il-Khân. The Sarbadârid state, under its last ruler, Khâjî ‘Alî Mu‘ayyad (r. 763-83/1362-81), was becoming Twelver Shi‘a.\textsuperscript{50} Mu‘izz al-Dîn Kart had triumphed over the Sarbadârs at the Battle of Zâva (Ṣafar 747/July 1342),\textsuperscript{61} when Herat itself was threatened by the Sarbadârs’ eastward

\textsuperscript{56} He prepared a response that has not survived, although the gist is known: Zayn al-Dîn was told to mind his own business. Taybâdî was overcome with rage (\textit{ghâzab mustawlî shud}), and retired to his mosque. Whence he emerged (after three days), he claims to have seen the path: Pîr ‘Alî must no longer rule Khurasan. Taybâdî decamped for Jâm to sojourn with the Shaykhs. En route, he encountered an emissary from God (\textit{rijâl Allâh}) who validated his decision to dethrone Pîr ‘Alî.\textsuperscript{57} Taybâdî’s determination to depose Pîr ‘Alî following the rejection of his \textit{naṣīhat-nâma} is confirmed by Faṣîh Khâfî.\textsuperscript{58}

We shall return to Taybâdî with his arrival at Jâm. First, we should explain the anti-Kartid dissent simmering in Khurasan.

\textsuperscript{59} Malik had strayed from his father’s path (\textit{jarīq-i pidar}), especially the path of détente with the (Shi‘i) Sarbadârs of Sabzavar. The Sarbadârs emerged in the tumultuous years that followed the death of sultan Abû Sa‘îd (d. 736/1335), the heirless Il-Khân. The Sarbadârid state, under its last ruler, Khâjî ‘Alî Mu‘ayyad (r. 763-83/1362-81), was becoming Twelver Shi‘a. Mu‘izz al-Dîn Kart had triumphed over the Sarbadârs at the Battle of Zâva (Ṣafar 747/July 1342), when Herat itself was threatened by the Sarbadârs’ eastward
advance. Since Zāva, Mu’izz al-Dīn had maintained a détente with the Sarbadārs who were tacitly permitted to expand to the west. The border between the Karts and the Sarbadārs was fixed west of Jām.

On succeeding his father in 771/1370, Pīr ‘Alī obtained a fatwa from scholars at a Ḥanafi Niẓāmiyya in Herat proclaiming him Malik al-Islām and duty bound to defend the Sunni path against the Shi’a.62 Pīr ‘Alī’s father’s “greatest triumph,” John Masson Smith noted, had been Zāva, and “we may imagine the eagerness of the prince to surpass his father’s exploits...”63 In 773/1371-72, Pīr ‘Alī initiated a series of campaigns against the Sarbadārs. The escalating campaigns damaged buildings, qanāts, and agriculture, ruining sections of Khurasan, especially Nishapur.64 Neighbouring states turned covetous eyes on the conflict-weakened Karts and Sarbadārs. An army led by Amīr Valī of Mazandaran marched into Khurasan. Shāh Shujā’, the Muẓaffarid ruler of Fars, sought to weaken the Karts and Sarbadārs and establish himself in Khurasan; he armed insurgents against the Sarbadārs.65 Temūr keenly assessed Kartid weaknesses.66 Pīr ‘Alī’s ill-conceived and protracted series of anti-Shi’a campaigns hastened his downfall.67

Destruction in Khurasan; disruptions to agricultural, pastoral and other economic activities; interference by foreign powers; and the depletion of the Kartid state’s political, financial, and military reservoirs were the consequences of Pīr ‘Alī’s campaigns. His moral standing evaporated: in an apocryphal but revealing story, Pīr ‘Alī queried a peasant: “Fellow, upon what is being a Muslim based?”; he tartly replied, “according to the Malik’s sect it consists of three things: grazing on the people’s grain, stopping up the canals, and ripping up the trees.”68 A medieval historian muses: “It is amazing that the jurists of the age through whose verdict [fatwa] he devastated Khwaja Ali Muayyad’s province, did not see the illegality of his actions.”69

The Shaykhs of Jām were aware of the Kartid state’s infirmities. The Kart vizier, Muʿīn al-Dīn Jāmī, had inside intelligence. The Shaykhs had Ahmad-i Jām’s shrine-complex and acolytes and dependents in Jām, Herat, Khwāf, and elsewhere to protect. Dependents included epigones, labourers, peasants, pastoralists, well-diggers, water-managers, and religious

63 Smith 1970, p. 150.
64 Hāfīz-i Abrū 1389/2010, pp. 197-198. See also Aubin 1974, p. 100.
Returning to Taybâdî’s arrival in Jâm following his quarrel with Pîr ‘Alî.

The scheme to support Temûr was possibly germinating when the furious Taybâdî descended on Jâm. He met with the Shaykh al-Islam of Jâm, the custodian (mutavallî), Shihâb al-Dîn Ismâ‘îl (d. 809/1407).\(^70\) Zîyâ al-Dîn Yûsuf (d. 797/1394-95),\(^71\) the vizier’s son and the chief of the khânâqâh (who from Rabî‘ II 782/5 July-2 August 1380 was šadr of Herat), was presumably present.\(^72\) The decision to depose Pîr ‘Alî Kart was made at Jâm (this is implied), and validated by the “Sultan of Khurasan,” ‘Alî b. Mûsâ al-Rîzâ (the eighth Imâm) and Aḥmad-i Jâm, both of whom materialized inside the rawţa of Aḥmad-i Jâm.\(^73\)

STATECRAFT AND THE KART VIZIER

Mu’în al-Dîn Jâmî was an erudite, sage, and experienced vizier. He was also quite devious. Mu’îzz al-Dîn Kart, the vizier’s uncle and father-in-law, jailed his vizier on two occasions. The indictment leading to one incarceration, c. 753-54/1352-53, included the charge of conspiring with the Chaghâtây Mongols of Transoxiana to depose the reigning malîk and replace him with his brother, Muḥammad Bâqrî.\(^74\) Despite their tempestuous relationship, Mu’în al-Dîn served Mu’îzz al-Dîn profitably for thirty-five years. When the episodes leading to the betrayal of Pîr ‘Alî by the Shaykhs and Taybâdî transpired, Mu’în al-Dîn was 79 or 80 (lunar) years old; he died several months after the capitulation of Herat in Muḥarram 783/April 1381.

Mu’în al-Dîn was the consummate diplomat and spymaster for the Kartîd state. In performing the Hajj and visiting other Islamic lands, he developed an extensive network of interlocutors. He stayed on warm terms

\(^{70}\) Bûzjânî 1345/1966, p. 109 (brief biography). The role of Shaykh al-Islâm of Jâm and custodian were held by the same person.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., pp. 108-109 (brief biography).

\(^{72}\) Zîyâ al-Dîn Yûsuf b. Mu’în al-Dîn and Shihâb al-Dîn Ismâ‘îl b. Rażî al-Dîn Aḥmad were cousins and inseparable friends.

\(^{73}\) Taybâdî 1382/2003, pp. 91-94; Taybâdî (Bodleian), ff. 21b-23a. Taybâdî’s prayers to Aḥmad-i Jâm for guidance while he is inside Aḥmad’s rawţa suggests that the decision to support Temûr was made at Jâm. The topos of blessings by Aḥmad and a descendant of the Prophet “proves” divine sanction for their actions against the Kart malîk. The Shaykhs and Taybâdî are not disloyal to a king, just obedient to God.

\(^{74}\) Mahendrarajah 2016.
with officials, Sufis, sayyids, ulama, judges, and dynasts in India and Iran, flattering them in letters interspersed with Qur’an verses and poetry. The names of the notables involved in the scheme against Pîr ‘Alî are not identified; however, they certainly came from the extended social-political network the vizier had developed since his appointment in 735/1334-35.

The importance of intelligence in statecraft is often under-appreciated. Niẓām al-Mulk has explicated at length on the indispensability of spies and intelligence bureaux in statecraft; and Adam Silverstein has demonstrated, *inter alia*, the practice of intelligence by sovereigns of pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran. The popular phrase, “Eyes and Ears of the King” encapsulates persistent state practices in Iran.

The Kartid state had a dossier on Temür since his earliest political struggles in Transoxiana: Temür’s family lived under Kartid protection; and during Temür’s years of political vagabondage, an important ally had been Mu’izz al-Dîn Kart. Temür’s niece married Pîr ‘Alî’s son, Pîr Muḥammad. The vizier knew Temür’s vanities, foibles, and strengths. His letters to Temür were informed by precise information from his interlocutors, and tailored to excite Temür’s interest.

THE LETTERS FROM MU’ÎN AL-DÎN JÄMÎ AND ZAYN AL-DÎN TAYBAĐÎ

The scheme to support Temür (against Pîr ‘Alî) as well as to draw him into the cult of Aḥmad-i Jâm included two letters by Mu’în al-Dîn and one by Taybâdî.

1. A letter, written in 781/1379-80 (year is inferred), from Mu’în al-Dîn to one of Temür’s šâdars in Samarqand;

2. A letter, written in 782/1380 (year is inferred), from Mu’în al-Dîn to Temür;

3. A letter from Taybâdî to Temür (no date; c. 782/1380).

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75 The *Fara’id-i Ghiyāsī* was compiled by a Jâmî shaykh to memorialize interactions between the Jâmî *gawîm* and notables from the Seljûq era to the reign of Shâh Rukh.
77 Silverstein 2007, especially pp. 21-23 and Part III (Mongol Iran).
78 Aubin 1976, p. 47.
81 Interlocutors included Jâmî family in Samarqand and Tirmiz.
83 Yûṣûf-i Ahl 1356/1977, I, pp. 73-81.
84 Navâ’î 1341/1963, pp. 1-3.
(1) Mu’īn al-Dīn Jāmī’s letter to Temūr’s officials in Samarqand

The letter to Samarqand was directed to Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Ubaydallāh ṣadr.85 This may be Khwāja Jalāl al-Dīn: he served as Temūr’s šāhid-dīvān.86 Following preambles and praises, Mu’īn al-Dīn Jāmī places his petition (ʿarz) without dissimilation (bīriyā) before Amīr Temūr, the Ḥāżrat Khusraw of the Age, because “Allah orders justice and good conduct,”87 and “kingship and religion are twins.”88 It is stated that the dawlat of Amīr Temūr is sage throughout his kingdom. A distich identifying the nature of the petition is inserted: the security of the people (amān-i khalq) is to be found within Temūr’s realm (dawlat-i tū).89 The vizier prays, now that Transoxiana is under Temūr’s control (after years of internal political struggles), that Temūr will direct his attention (tawajjuh namāyad) toward the conquest of other nations, specifically (bih takhṣīs), a “fearful Khurasan” (khurāsān-i hirāsān). The letter makes manifest that he is not writing solely on his behalf, and that commoners and notables are praying for relief.

This is Mu’īn al-Dīn Jāmī’s “invitation” to Temūr. His opening gambit is local support in figuratively opening the gates to Herat. Jāmī must have been confident that his offer would reach Temūr, and that the letter’s contents would not reach Pīr ‘Alī. One may imagine the machinations leading to, and subsequent with, the missive’s delivery to Jalāl al-Dīn.90 Mu’īn al-Dīn surely received a favourable response from Temūr or his advisers encouraging him to advance the dialogue. Jāmī knew he had Temūr’s attention when he drafted his second missive. In this eloquent document, he artfully marketed his family and Aḥmad-i Jām to Temūr.

(2) Mu’īn al-Dīn Jāmī’s letter to Temūr

The vizier’s lengthy letter is paraphrased below.91

We are the descendants of Aḥmad-i Jām. Aḥmad’s descendants are blessed by Allah. The spirits of the true (sādiq) and the pure (pāk), in

87 Q16:90 (Sūrat al-Nahl).
89 Ibid. The complete line: amān-i khalq tā’yi pas du’ā’-yi dawlat-i tū.
90 The Sayyids of Tirmiz were the Jāmīs’ conduit to Temūr. However, as Beatrix Manz reminded the present author, the Sayyids twice conspired against Temūr. Alliances in Transoxiana were fluid. Personal communication, 13 January 2016. This is a fair point. It is not possible to determine where the Sayyids stood politically vis-à-vis Temūr when the two letters were delivered to the appropriate parties in Samarqand in 781-82/1379-80.
particular (*bih takhṣīs*), the spirits of our great progenitors who are reposing at the blessed shrine at Jām, guide the actions of Aḥmad’s descendants. Sultan Sanjar, son of Malikshāh al-Seljūq, had been the Padishah of the world and Khusraw of his Age, but Sanjar had been Aḥmad’s “child and acolyte” (*fārzand va murīd*).92 His immense glory and political longevity are God’s favours on account of his deep devotion to Aḥmad-i Jām, the “protector of the realm” (*mulk-pānah*). Sanjar’s devotion included working alongside the dervishes to knead clay to the roof of Aḥmad’s *khāṇaqāh* so he could tell God he had served Him by building the roof of the hospice of one of His saints. “When before Zhanda Pīl,93 the presence of God, Sanjar was but a slave kneading clay.”94 For demonstrating faith (*i’tiqād*) in this manner, God gave Sanjar the world. He reigned for sixty years as the sultan of his age.

Muʾīn al-Dīn’s strategy is evident: Sanjar was a great king but he could not have reached the zenith of his potential without Aḥmad’s guiding hand and protection. Sanjar was the last of the grand and noble Turkic kings of the pre-Mongol period in Transoxiana. Although Temür adopted Chiggis-sid protocols and emulated Chinggis Khan, he was not immune to the allure of Sanjar’s (idealized) legacy. Muʾīn al-Dīn was extending to Temür the very goblet from which Sanjar had quaffed. Temür drank from it.

The Kart vizier does not forget to promote his political program. In a distich, he reminds Temür of the ease with which Khurasan can be had—if he had cooperation: “to any king that [Khurasan] wants to give itself to, it will surrender itself to him” (*bih har malikī kih khwāḥad raft, khwāḥad raft taslīm-īsh*).95

In Żūl-Ḥijja 782/February-March 1381, Temür visited the shrine at Jām. He was hosted by Žiyā al-Dīn Yūsuf Jāmi (the vizier’s son). They established a concord. Temūr accepted his advice to reign as a just king, performed *ziyarāt* over Aḥmad’s grave, and donated two *khāṇaqāhs*.96 The hagiographer, ‘Alī Būzjānī, is probably embroidering by asserting that Temūr became Žiyā al-Dīn Yūsuf’s acolyte.97 Nonetheless, it is evident that Temūr and Žiyā al-Dīn had instituted a mutually nourishing relationship. Shihāb al-Dīn Ismāʿīl and Žiyā al-Dīn joined Temūr on campaign;98

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92 On addressing emperors as one of Aḥmad’s children, see Safī 2006, p. 155.
93 Aḥmad’s nickname was Zhanda Pīl, translated as “colossal elephant” or “terrible elephant”.
95 Yūsuf-i Ahl 1356/1977, I, p. 175.
and Temür’s son, Mīrānshāh (d. 810/1408), the governor of Khurāsan, held the vizier’s second ascetic son, Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar (n.d.) in high esteem and performed ziyārat at Aḥmad’s shrine. It is manifest that a relationship between the Sufis and Timurids had been inaugurated during Temür’s visit to Jām. The vizier’s letter helped establish the concord between the Timurid and Jāmīs. The apogee of this association arrived under Shāh Rukh (d. 850/1447) and his munificent spouse, Gawhar Shād (d. 861/1457).

(3) Zayn al-Dīn Taybādī’s Letter to Temūr

Before analyzing Taybādī’s letter, his spiritual connections must be explicated. Taybādī claimed ʿuwaysī initiation by the spirit of Aḥmad-i Jām. Aḥmad claims Abū Saʾīd b. Abū al-Khayr (d. 440/1049) as his spiritual master. The links: Abū Saʾīd → Aḥmad → Taybādī. Taybādī was devoted to Aḥmad and close to Aḥmad’s successors at Jām.

The foundation for the Qur’anic allusion from Sūrat al-Kahf (Q18:60-82) that Taybādī employs should be laid. The prophet Moses (Mūsā) is traveling on a boat with his servant, identified in Islamic tradition as Khīżr. Khīżr scuttles the boat; on shore, he executes a boy who did no harm; and in a village where inhabitants had refused to feed the two famished travellers, Khīżr nonetheless repaired a damaged section of wall. With each incident, Khīżr is confronted by Moses, but Khīżr counsels patience. The reasons for Khīżr’s ostensibly bizarre actions are eventually revealed to Moses.

There are various interpretations of this story; for instance, that Moses represents exoteric knowledge and Khīżr esoteric knowledge. According to ʿAbdullāh Yūsuf ʿAlī, the allusion illustrates that although Moses was erudite, knowledge and sagacity did not facilitate comprehension of everything. Paradoxes persist in every aspect of life, where “apparent loss may be real gain; apparent cruelty may be real mercy; returning good for evil may really be justice and not generosity,” for “Allah’s wisdom transcends all human calculation.” Taybādī is signalling to Temūr that the actions of the Shaykhs in betraying the Kart malik, like Khīżr’s actions, have divine implications that God will reveal on His schedule. By

100 Mahendrarajah 2016, pp. 118-119.
103 Renard 2003, III, pp. 81-84.
imputing divine guidance to Muʿīn al-Dīn’s letters, Taybāḏī is appealing to Temūr’s self-image as divinely favoured (see below).

The letter: Taybāḏī writes that kings must honour (taʿżīm) and favour (riʿayāt) those who are pure of spirit (pākān), and their descendants (farzandān), quoting Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr (from his Maqāmāt), who had beseeched that his descendants be honoured after his death. Taybāḏī quotes Aḥmad-i Jām (from his Maqāmāt), that whoever places his faith (iʿtiqād) in Aḥmad shall find salvation (salām); or whoever places his faith in Aḥmad’s disciples or in Aḥmad’s descendants, has done God’s work. Taybāḏī segues to Khiżr, how Moses had not understood why he had rebuilt the wall, which he did “so that the treasure that lay [hidden] beneath would be safe until the two orphaned sons of the wall’s owner could reach their majority and thus claim their inheritance.” 105 By his actions, Khiżr had honoured the father of two orphans (Sūrat al-Kahf, Q18:82).

Taybāḏī connects the two orphans to Aḥmad-i Jām and Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr. This is masterful. The metaphorical and the literal converge; Taybāḏī implies that the two Sufi masters are analogous with the two orphans,106 and that their descendants who still live (awlād-i ishān ānchih ijāand) deserve Temūr’s “patronage and protection” (ʿinayāt va hīmayāt).107 He prays for the bestowal of favours (bih naẓar-i ʿinayāt manzūr gardand) upon the descendants of Ahmad-i Jām and Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr. All pious deeds will benefit (niʿmat) Temūr.

We shall return to Taybāḏī’s and Jāmī’s letters in the concluding remarks.

EXPLOITING TEMŪR’S SUPERSTITIONS

Beatrice Forbes Manz sums Temūr’s religious Weltanschauung:

In religion as in other aspects of his life Temūr was above all an opportunist; his religion served frequently to further his aims, but almost never to circumscribe his actions. His attitude towards men of religion is well summarized in Jean Aubin’s felicitous phrase, as a mixture of “intellectual curiosity and superstitious prudence.”108

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105 Navāʾī 1341/1963, p. 2; Renard 2003.
106 Taybāḏī uses yatīm, meaning “a fatherless minor child.” This word makes over twenty appearances in the Qur’ān, with verses “celebrating God’s providence toward the orphan Muhammad (Q93:6)”; “warn against oppressing orphans... (Q93:9)”; “identify those who turn away the orphan as unbelievers (Q107:2).” Giladi 2003, III, pp. 603-604.
107 Hīmayāt, protection, defence, patronage; ʿinayāt: favour, approval, patronage.
A stellar example of Temūr’s reverence for holy men and self-professed abilities at augury is given by Vladimir Barthold. On Temūr’s march into Khurasan, a holy man (Bābā Sangū) “regarded as a saintly personage, threw before Temūr a piece of raw meat from the breast of an animal.” Most observers would have concurred with Barthold’s assessment that Bābā Sangū was “an idiot,” but not Temūr, “who declared that this was a favourable omen and that God was evidently delivering into his hands Khurasan, ‘the breast of the surface of the world’”.

Temūr claimed prophetic visions, supernatural insights, and communion with angels (“dit que Dieu lui révèle toutes choses par l’ange”). This type of intelligence about a political-military leader is craved by opponents because they can try to use it to manipulate his policies or behaviour. Mu‘īn al-Dīn Jāmī’s interlocutors in Samarqand and Tīrmīz will have reported on Temūr’s boasts of divine favour. The content and tenor of the letters by Jāmī and Taybādī, and Taybādī’s words during his meeting with Temūr, were guided by precise intelligence and calibrated to arouse Temūr’s “intellectual curiosity and superstitious prudence.”

**Temūr in Taybād**

Temūr’s march through Khurasan brought him to Turbat-i Jām, where he paid homage to Aḥmad-i Jām; thence to Kūsūyī; thence to Taybād, where Temūr met Taybādī. These events transpired in early Zūl-Hijja 782/February or March 1381. Ḥāfīz-i Abrū reported on the meeting between Taybādī and Temūr from Temūr’s direct report to him. Ḥāfīz-i Abrū’s account was utilized by other chroniclers.

The gist of the story: Temūr wanted to meet Zayn al-Dīn but he refused. (Taybādī had written to Temūr. An invitation was to be expected.) Taybādī asked Temūr to come to him. (This act of lèse-majesté was calculated to excite Temūr’s interest.) Temūr came to Taybād. He reported to Ḥāfīz-i Abrū of his experience with Zayn al-Dīn Taybādī: in previous encounters with holy men, they had revealed their fear of him, but Taybādī had caused him to experience “fear and dread” (ru‘b va harās).

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110 Aubin 1963, especially pp. 88-89. Quote is from the diary of a friar. Temūr’s assertions served to demonstrate that he enjoyed God’s favour.


hagiographical account states that Temür said to Taybādī: “I have met many ascetics and mystics and all were afraid of me, [but] I was afraid of you.”

Aḥmad b. ‘Arabshāh corroborates and augments Šāhīz-i Abrū’s account and the narrative in Taybādī’s hagiography:

> When [Temūr] reached [Taybādī], the old man rose, but Timur bent with his face bowed towards his own feet and the old man put his hands on his back. Timur said: “If the old man had not quickly removed his hand from my back, I should have thought it was broken; and I truly thought the sky had fallen on the earth, and that I was to be broken between the two with a mighty breaking.”

According to Taybādī’s hagiographer, when Temūr arrived at Taybādī’s sarā’ī, the Mawlānā stepped outside to greet him. Taybādī grasped him gently (va mawlānā shaykh al-islām [ishān rāj dar bar girift va bīfashurd), but Temūr exclaimed, “when my hand was clasped, I became afraid that I will die” (dast az man bāz dar kih mītarsam ḥalāḵ shavam).

The specifics of their encounter are unsound. Nevertheless, it is evident from Šāhīz-i Abrū’s sedate account that Temūr had experienced a spiritual moment where he had sensed something that he articulated as “fear and dread.” This spiritual experience stands in contradistinction to Temūr’s experience with Shāh Ni’matullāh Valī Kirmānī (d. 834/1431), where Temūr’s heart had held firm but the mystic’s heart betrayed him: “Après son entretien avec Ni’matullāh, il constata que son cœur l’avait emporté et que Ni’matullāh avait eu peur.” Temūr lost respect for Ni’matullāh. He was excluded from Temūr’s circle, and allegedly exiled from Transoxiana. The assertion that Temūr was testing Taybādī’s resolve (tū rā intihān mīkardam) rings true.

Taybādī’s insolence earned him Tamerlane’s respect.

Taybādī’s insolence was a stratagem to advance his agenda. He had written to Temūr before their meeting; Temūr’s invitation was not unexpected. Moreover, Žiyā al-Dīn Yūsuf or Shihāb al-Dīn Ismāʿīl would have commended Taybādī to Temūr as a revered holy man he had to meet.

115 Taybādī 1382/2003, p. 72; Taybādī (Bodleian), f. 12a-b. The hagiographer will have been familiar with Šāhīz-i Abrū’s writings.


117 Taybādī 1382/2003, p. 71 (brackets by the editor); Taybādī (Bodleian): f. 11b. The past stem of fashurdan (squeeze, compress) is used.


119 Aubin 1956, p. 15.

120 Taybādī 1382/2003, p. 72; Taybādī (Bodleian): f. 12a-b.
The dismissal was to attract Temür’s attention, and compel him to “play” inside Taybādī’s arena where Taybādī somehow caused Temür to experience something spiritual. (Taybādī was eccentric; his mannerisms probably made Temür trepidatious.) This was clever: Temür was accustomed to Sufis coming to him palpably afraid, but not a Sufi who challenged him so directly. Like the “idiot” who tossed raw meat afore Temür, eccentric holy men caught Temür’s eye.

Triumphant, Taybādī promoted the Jāmī spiritual community during his meeting with Temūr. He showed how they could help Temūr with the pacification of Herat, and petitioned Temūr to spare Herat bloodshed and ruin. At Temūr’s behest, Taybādī advised him. Three elements from their discourse are parsed below.

First, after listening to Taybādī’s “edifying discourse,” Temūr inquired if Pīr ‘Alī had been similarly advised. Zayn al-Dīn retorted, “We have spoken to him and he has not obeyed. God has sent you against him. Now we say to you: ‘if you do not obey, God will send someone else against you’.”121 The sober Barthold: “[i]t is difficult to say how far this conversation has been embellished by Temūr and historians who took down his words.”122 The discourse is in Ḥāfīz-i Abrū,123 Khwāndamīr,124 al-Samarqandī,125 and the Maqāmār126 and Malfūz.127 The assertion that Temūr was sent by God to remove a wicked king, Pīr ‘Alī, makes Temūr “God’s scourge” (Gottesgeißel).128 As an aside, the “God’s scourge” theme propounded here made its way to sixteenth century England and Christopher Marlowe’s most famous play, Tambourlaine the Great. This post-Mongol hagiographical motif justifies the betrayal of Pīr ‘Alī by Taybādī, the Jāmī Shaykhs, and others: Pīr ‘Alī strayed from the Straight Path his father walked so he had to be deposed. Devin DeWeese analyzed this explanatory paradigm with reference to Sufis and Khīzr who had collaborated with the Mongols by identifying “evildoers” for execution.129

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122 Ibid.
126 Taybādī 1382/2003, p. 73.
127 Taybādī (Bodleian), ff. 12b-13a.
128 Paul 1990, p. 308.
129 DeWeese 2006, pp. 23-60, especially pp. 36-42.
Second, Taybādī pleads that Temūr “not enslave or pillage the people of Herat” (mardum-i herāt-rā asīr va ghārat nakunī). The phrase “asīr va ghārat nakunī” is in Faṣīḥ Khwāfī’s chronography. That Temūr treated Herat benignly is evident not from later atrocities at Isfahan and elsewhere, but from what Temūr’s armies did days before surrounding Herat in Muḥarram 783/April 1381. Temūr quit Taybād and marched to Herat via Fushanj, where his army was resisted. In Zū al-Ḥijja 782/March 1381, Fushanj was captured and pillaged: “all its defenders were put to the sword.”

Third, Taybādī continues his soliloquy before Temūr with respect to saving Herat by arguing that: “great and dear sādāt, ʿulamā, and mashāʾik [live] in [Herat,] the city of spirits (arvāḥ ābād). Their progenitors (ijdād) are your helpers (mumīḍd) and supporters (muʿāvin), and assistance within the world of spirits (ʿālam-i arvāḥ) is superior to all the armies, treasures, and defences.” Taybādī identifies the descendants of Aḥmad-i Jām among the Heratis seeking succour, and who would be available to guide (dalīl) and serve (hashamat) his kingdom (mamlakat-i tū). Taybādī’s appeal to save Herat and its people has three components: (1) compassion (low probability of success); (2) political: temporal assistance from Herati notables in the pacification of Herat; for example, governance and the collection of ransoms (high probability of success); (3) spiritual: like the angels with whom Temūr said he communed (“Dieu lui révèle toutes choses par l’ange”), the benefits of “supporters” in the spiritual realm may have outweighed the risks of offending spirits by sacking Herat (medium to high probability of success). It seems that Zayn al-Dīn had successfully piqued Temūr’s “... superstitious prudence.”

ANALYSES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Zayn al-Dīn Taybādī’s and Temūr’s celebrated meeting has been referenced by Jean Aubin, V. V. Barthold, Beatrice Manz, Jürgen Paul, and Lawrence Potter. Manz shows Temūr cultivating Sufi shaykhs in Transoxiana and Khurasan who would “attest to his superior spiritual powers” and “justify his invasion and conquest of Islamic lands ... [Moreover] timely visits to the powerful shaykhs of Andkhud and Turbat-i Shaykh-i

130  Taybādī 1382/2003, p. 73; Taybādī (Bodleian), f. 13a.
134  Taybādī 1382/2003, p. 74; Taybādī (Bodleian), f. 13a. The editor writes mumaddad.
Jām in Khurasan elicited their endorsements...

Lawrence Potter follows Manz: “[t]he blessing of the shaikhs of Jām was the psychological key to [Temür’s] victory over the Karts...” These are unobjectionable views; however, both scholars are articulating Temür’s perspective: endorsements and blessings were Temür’s political imperatives. Blessings, although beneficial, are not indispensable. The perspectives of the Shaykhs of Jām and Taybādī are not appreciated. With the impending demise of the Kartid dynasty, the Shaykhs of Jām sought new protectors and patrons. They needed Temür more than he needed them. The Shaykhs’ new overlord had to assume the role of protector of the Sufi shrine community and its extensive estates in Khurasan. If Temür were to become a devotee of Aḥmad or patron of the shrine, that would be a donative.

Hagiographers crafted an image of Zayn al-Dīn as the pious ascetic who had no interest in royalty; hence his curt dismissal of Temür. The Maqāmāt-i Taybādī tediously insists that Taybādī had no business with kings—except, evidently, Mu’izz al-Dīn Kart. Taybādī desired a seat at the royal table, not for wealth or favours, but for prestige and pride. His Maqāmāt makes manifest Taybādī’s pride at having been Mu’izz al-Dīn’s spiritual adviser, and his role in shaping Khurasan into dār al-islām kubrā. Taybādī’s anger toward Pīr ‘Alī stems partly from hubris: anger because he was no longer a king’s preceptor, and anger at the rejection of his (unsolicited) advice. The Maqāmāt unwittingly reveals that Taybādī had thoroughly enjoyed his meeting with Temūr and his cortège, and revelled in dispensing advice to a great king.

This essay is about the “politics of notables” and how notables acted in concert to address a crisis; indeed, an existential crisis for notables and commoners in Herat and its environs. For notables (a’yān), “politics was a secondary pursuit to be engaged in only to achieve specific goals, and especially in moments of crisis.” Crisis was upon them. The motivations of Khurasan’s notables were diverse:

Taybādī’s pride was wounded, but he was a fervent epigone of Aḥmad-i Jām who would do what he could to protect the shrine and Aḥmad’s descendants. The other participating notables of Khurasan—ulama, sayyids, judges, chiefs (ṣadr, kadkhudā)—had unique reasons that are lacunae to historians.

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136 Ibid.
137 Potter 1992, p. 120.
139 As mentioned (see “Statecraft and the Kart vizier”), the names of the other notables are not known to the modern historian, but would have come from the vizier’s extensive social-political network of judges, chiefs, ulama, and sayyids. The vizier’s first letter to Temūr states that he is writing on behalf of commoners and notables.
Most notables surely had altruistic motives for betraying Pîr ‘Alî. The public had lost confidence in Pîr ‘Alî’s leadership. Notables were responsive to the apprehensions of Khurasanians and their acute desire to avoid a calamitous clash with Temûr, especially after enduring social and economic debilitations during the decade-long conflict between the Karts and Sarbadârs. Temûr was no mere brigand at the gates of Herat: like Chinggis Khân, he posed an existential threat to Herat. The thoughts and actions of Heratis were assuredly shaped by Herat’s history under the Mongols. Notables of Khurasan and Transoxiana, frequently led by Shaykh al-Islâms, had an illustrious history of benefiting the commonweal by defusing crises. The mediations of the Qadi and Shaykh al-Islâm of Samarqand, Shaykh al-Islâm Shihâb al-Dîn Ismâ‘îl Jâmî, and Shaykh al-Islâm Quṭ al-Dîn Chishtî, demonstrate this fact.

The Shaykhs of Jâm acted to defuse the crisis precipitated by Pîr ‘Alî’s decision to fight Temûr. Considering the Kartid military’s asthenic condition after a decade of war with the Sarbadârs, and Heratis’ lack of resolve to fight, an unbridled war with Temûr will have been catastrophic. Ḥâfiz-i Abrû’s observation (shaped by Temûr’s evaluation), is that Pîr ‘Alî was an imprudent king and inept general. Pîr ‘Alî refused to discuss terms with Temûr. In contrast, ‘Alî Mu‘ayyad, the Sarbadâr, went to Temûr, pledged vassalage and (ostensibly) abjured his Shi‘i orientation. Because Pîr ‘Alî insisted on war instead of vassalage, notables hatched a scheme to reach an accord with Temûr.

Actors against Pîr ‘Alî included Mu‘în al-Dîn Jâmî (Kart vizier); the vizier’s son, Žiyâ al-Dîn Yusuf (chief of the khânaqâh at Jâm and the Kartid şadr); Shaykh al-Islâm Shihâb al-Dîn Ismâ‘îl (mutavallî, shrine of Aḥmad-i Jâm); Zayn al-Dîn Taybâdî; and Khurasanian notables from Jâmî social-political networks.

First, notables led by the vizier made it known to Temûr that he had support in Khurasan and inside the Kartid court. Unlike ‘Alî Mu‘ayyad, notables could not step outside the city’s gates to welcome Temûr and pledge their allegiance; that signal had to come from the Kart malik. The 781/1379-80 letter by Mu‘în al-Dîn served to alert Temûr of internal support (before he reached Herat’s gates), and the desire (implied in the letter) for the bloodless transfer of Herat: the security of the people (amân-i khalq), the vizier wrote, lay inside your (Temûr’s) realm (dawlat-i tû). Second, Taybâdî’s role in the sub-plot was to attract Temûr to the saint cult of Aḥmad-i Jâm. The shrine needed his support for the renewal of their tax immunities and continued possession of valuable estates. This was the minimum. Were Temûr to become a devotee, that would be a bonus. The shrine and estates required physical security; for example, Mîrânshâh,
the governor of Khurasan, included a clause in his 796/1394 decree that confirmed protection from bandits for the shrine’s estates.140

Following his letter to Temür’s sadr in Samarqand, the vizier wrote to Temür and marketed Aḥmad-i Jām and his descendants. He showed how Sanjar had been august and ruled for sixty years, but only because he had showed devotion to Aḥmad.

Taybādī’s letter to Temür followed the vizier’s. It complements his promotion of Aḥmad-i Jām and Aḥmad’s descendants. Zayn al-Dīn pleads for Temür’s “patronage and protection” (‘inayāt va ḥimayāt) for the “pure of spirit” (pākan) and their descendants (farzandān), viz., the successors of Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr and Aḥmad then living in Khurasan (awlād-i āschān ānchih injāand).

Unity of purpose and effort by Muʿīn al-Dīn and Taybādī is implied: firstly, the Jāmī and Taybādī spiritual communities were close; secondly, Taybādī went to Jām immediately after his quarrel with Pīr ‘Alī and met with the Shaykhs; thirdly, the timing and sequence of events, common themes in letters, etc., strongly suggest coordination.

Temūr was a man of “extraordinary intelligence ... a master politician and military strategist.” He knew the value of patience, forbearance, and alliances. Temūr accepted the support offered by notables of Khurasan. Temūr came to Jām not only to collect blessings but for ziyarāt at the tomb of Aḥmad-i Jām.141 He was impressed with Taybādī following the Sufi’s calculated act of lèse-majesté and masterful performance during their colloquy. Temūr accepted Taybādī’s supplication: mardum-i herātrā asīr va ghārat nakunī.

Destruction in Herat was kept to a minimum: fortifications were demolished; the iron gates of Herat and the treasures of the Karts were conveyed to Transoxiana. The city paid a ransom. Temūr held the cession ceremonial in the Ravens’ Garden. The next day, Herati notables came forth to greet Temūr and pledge allegiance (bandagf). However, two hundred distinguished notables (kadkhudā-i muʿtabar) from Khurasan were deported to Transoxiana.142 Notables supporting the vizier’s scheme were conceivably not deported.

140 Yūsuf-i Ahl (Berlin), ff. 314a-315b.
Though Temür claimed Zayn al-Dīn Taybāḍī was one of the “three spiritual patrons to whom he owed his success,”¹⁴³ Taybāḍī fades from Timurid chronicles, but not from Timurid memories. In 848/1444, an attractive īvān (portal arch) and gunbad (dome-chamber) were erected behind Taybāḍī’s tumulus by Shāh Rukh’s vizier, Pīr ʿAḥmad Khwāfī. Ahmad-i Jām’s shrine and successors were patronized and protected by Timurid rulers and grand officials until the demise of the Timurid epoch in Herat. The mutually profitable relationship between the Timurids of Persia and the Sufis of Jām lasted for 125 years. The Timurids of India, the Mughals (1526-1857), were descended from ʿAḥmad-i Jām and Temūr.¹⁴⁴ It all began with the Kartid vizier’s letters to Samarqand.

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¹⁴³ Barthold 1958, II, p. 22.
¹⁴⁴ Humāyūn (1508-1556), son of Bābur (1483-1530), and Akbar the Great (1542-1605), son of Humāyūn, both had Jāmī mothers.


Khâfı 1339/1960

Khândâmīr 1333/1954

Khwandāmīr 1994

Mahendrarajah 2012

——— 2014

——— 2016

Manz 1989

——— 2007

Meier 1986

Mîrkhând 1380/2001

Moayyad 1984

Nâvâṭî 1341/1963

Nizam al-Mulk 1960

Paul 1990

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Taybādī (Bodleian)


Yūsuf-ī Ahl (Berlin)

Yūsuf-i Ahl 1356/1977

——— 1358/1979